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Central Intelligence Agency

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Washington, D.C. 20505

## DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

7 November 1985

Cambodia: Preparing for the 1985-86 Dry Season

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Summary

We believe the military balance in favor of Vietnam will not be altered dramatically during the coming dry season as Hanoi maintains relentless military pressure against the Cambodian resistance. We expect the Vietnamese to mount aggressive sweep operations against guerrillas along the border and in the interior but, because of the political and military costs, they will avoid large-scale attacks against resistance bases in Thailand that would be necessary to destroy the resistance outright. We also expect Hanoi to bolster its border defenses to restrict further resistance infiltration. The non-Communist Khmer People's National Liberation Front (KPNLF) and Armee Nationale Sihanoukienne (ANS) probably will make little headway toward becoming an effective guerrilla force in the face of stepped-up Vietnamese pressure and persistent internal problems. Factional rivalries have intensified recently within the KPNLF, which now faces one of its most serious leadership crises. Communist Democratic Kampuchea (DK) forces, however, probably will take advantage of Hanoi's emphasis on the border to sustain an active guerrilla campaign in the interior.

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This memorandum was prepared by [ ] Office of East Asian Analysis. Information available as of 6 November 1985 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to Chief, Southeast Asia Division, OEA, [ ]

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Hanoi Hangs Tough

Vietnam kept steady pressure on resistance forces during the rainy season, preventing any significant erosion of military gains achieved over the past year and a half. Intensive sweep operations throughout the border region kept non-Communist guerrillas off balance and hampered, but did not prevent infiltration by the more resilient DK forces.

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While focusing military pressure along the border, Hanoi also has moved aggressively to disrupt guerrilla activity in the interior.

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The DK: Still Active in the Interior

We believe Communist resistance activity during this year's rainy season has been below the pace set in 1983, when the DK had its best performance so far. Vietnam's aggressive rainy season posture clearly hampered DK operations, keeping guerrillas off balance and rendering supply links to the interior tenuous.

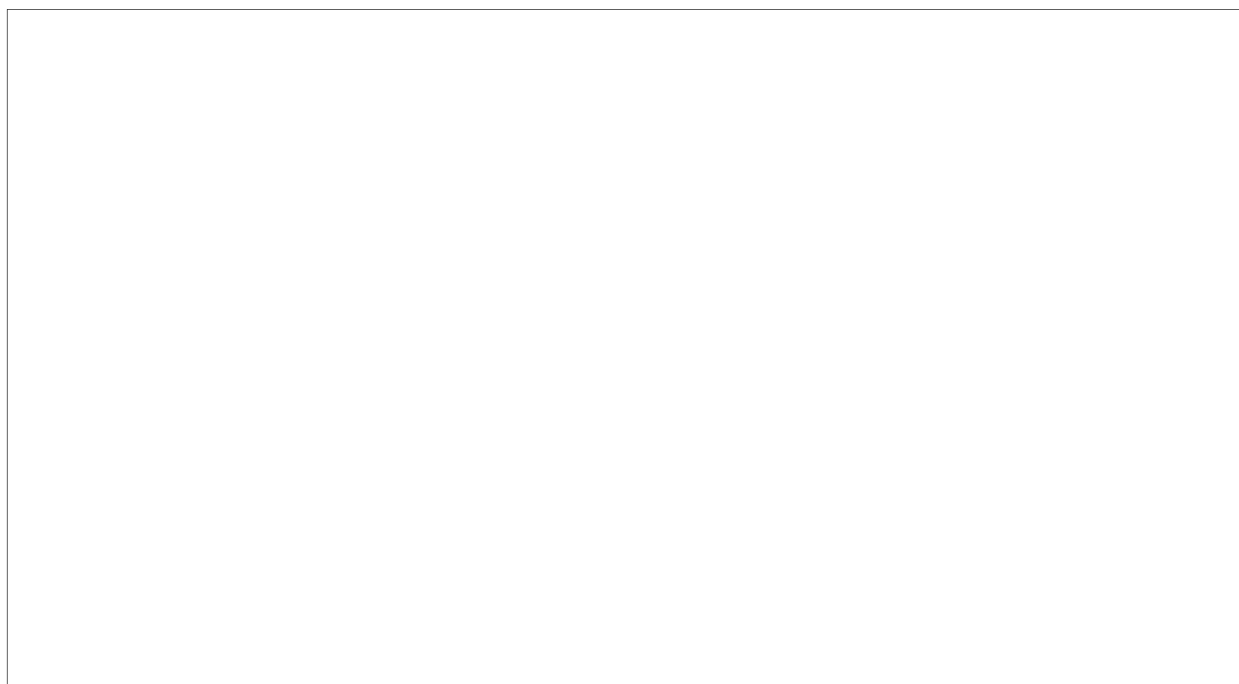
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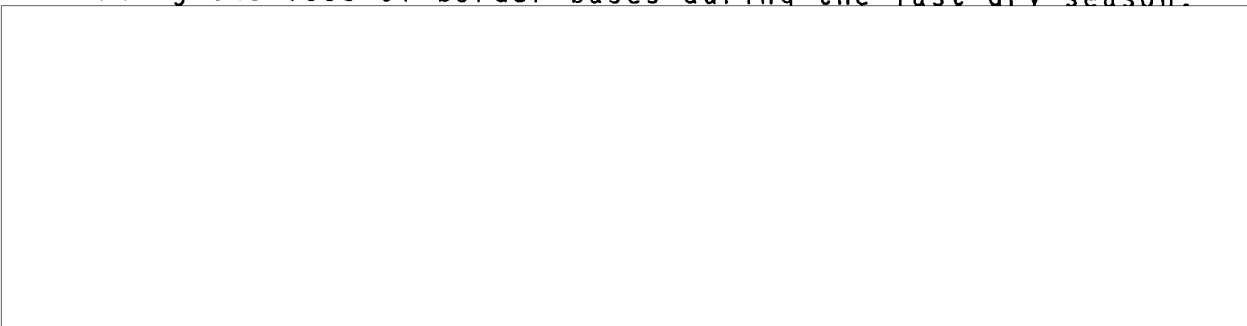



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The Non-Communists: Little Progress

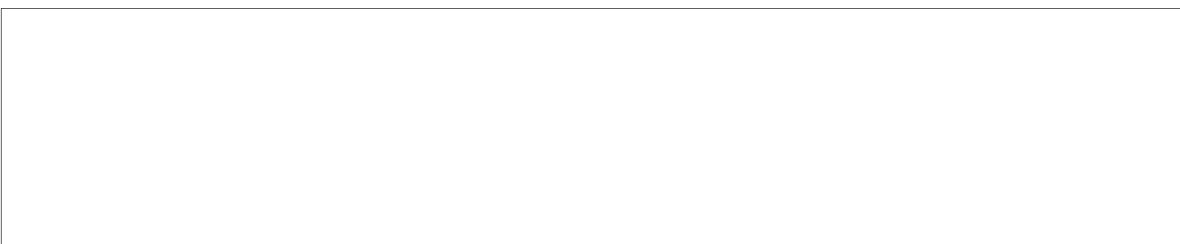
Despite occasional signs of improvement, the non-Communists made little progress in implementing their guerrilla strategy during the rainy season. The US Embassy in Bangkok reports that most KPNLF troops are still in Thailand, where they deployed following the loss of border bases during the last dry season.

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 the non-Communists continue to be harassed in the interior by DK forces determined to prevent non-Communist gains at their expense. ANS Chief of Staff Teap Ben recently lamented that he was fighting two adversaries: the Vietnamese and the DK. According to the US Embassy in Bangkok, KPNLF Commander-in-Chief Sak Sutsakhan shares this concern, complaining that supply caches not discovered by the Vietnamese were destroyed by the DK. Sak also asserts that DK forces are obstructing infiltration routes. Although appeals to Thailand and China by non-Communist officials usually ease the problem

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[redacted]

temporarily, the DK probably will continue to impede the non-Communists. [redacted]

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### The KPNLF's Deepening Leadership Crisis

Mounting leadership problems within the KPNLF have further undermined efforts to implement an effective guerrilla strategy. Although long plagued by factional rivalries, we believe the KPNLF is facing one of its most serious leadership crises. KPNLF President Son Sann has been the primary instigator of the latest imbroglio that has engulfed both the political and the military components. In recent months, he has maneuvered to bolster his position at the expense of perceived rivals and to gut earlier ASEAN-inspired reorganization efforts. Meanwhile, disharmony within the military command--that many believe has been incited by Son Sann--continues to threaten the facade of a coherent military organization that is largely responsible for the KPNLF's political survival.

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[redacted]

Although Thai intervention has eased tensions in recent weeks, deep personal antipathies among senior KPNLF leaders remain, making further internal disputes probable. [redacted]

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For now, Thai officials probably will continue efforts to smooth over differences between senior KPNLF leaders, hoping that the right combination of pressure and cajoling will ease the destructive infighting. With the UN General Assembly in session, Bangkok will avoid any moves that could damage now-solid international political support for the resistance. But some ASEAN members--particularly Indonesia and Malaysia--are becoming impatient with the stalemate in Cambodia and increasingly concerned over the lack of progress in the non-Communist resistance effort. As a result, we believe there is a good chance that Bangkok will move following the UN General Assembly to curb Son Sann's divisive maneuverings. The most probable course of action, in our view, includes further restrictions on his authority, but we cannot rule out the possibility of outright dismissal should Son Sann continue on his present course. In any event, we foresee no dramatic improvement in KPNLF leadership soon given the lack of capable alternatives to Son Sann and the depth of internal rivalries. [redacted]

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### The 1985-86 Dry Season: A New Pattern Emerging?

The Vietnamese probably will stick with their current strategy of maintaining military pressure along the border while mounting intensive sweeps against guerrillas in the interior--a departure from the traditional dry season pattern that featured large-scale assaults against guerrilla bases. The Vietnamese logistic buildup so far does not appear to be adequate to support operations on the scale of the last dry season even though Vietnamese and PRK forces along the border can launch ground and

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[redacted] artillery attacks against resistance bases with little warning. [redacted]

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With the military balance tipped strongly in its favor, we believe Hanoi has no compelling reason to incur the costs that would be associated with large-scale attacks against resistance camps in Thailand. But the Vietnamese probably calculate that continued military pressure will be required throughout the dry season to move closer to their ultimate goal of breaking the will of the resistance and its foreign backers.\* In our view, an element of this pressure will include limited cross-border raids against resistance positions, which probably will result in occasional sharp clashes with Thai forces. For its part, Thailand on occasion may feel compelled to respond sharply to Vietnamese intrusions to demonstrate for domestic and international consumption firm resolve in defending Thai soil. Nonetheless, we believe Bangkok and Hanoi will avoid serious escalation. [redacted]

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We do not expect the non-Communists to make much headway during the dry season, which favors Hanoi's heavy conventional Army. Stepped-up Vietnamese military pressure will render even shallow infiltration difficult. [redacted]

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On the other hand, we believe the DK will sustain its current interior campaign and will continue efforts to bolster internal support. [redacted]

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[redacted] we believe recent efforts to reorganize and reposition forces will improve the DK's potential to step up interior guerrilla operations, but the DK will be unable to alter the current military situation dramatically. [redacted]

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\*As enunciated by the commander of Vietnamese forces in Cambodia, Le Duc Anh, last December, Vietnamese strategy of destroying resistance bases and blocking infiltration to the interior is designed to demoralize the resistance and its supporters by demonstrating the futility of their cause. Hanoi realizes that protracted military pressure is key to ultimate success. The Vietnamese also realize that to relent now would ensure the erosion of past gains and a return to the unproductive cyclical pattern of previous years. [redacted]

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